

Book Reviews

Kant as Philosophical Anthropologist. F.P. van de Pitte.  
The Hague: Nijhoff 1971. £2.40.

It is possible to think of two very different styles of anthropology. Kant is one of the more important fore-runners of a tradition which is well represented on the Continent today. Such 'rationalists' do not deride the possibility of synthetical a priori judgements. Their 'philosophical anthropology' is metaphysical in that judgements of this type perform a crucial role in the construction of human nature. Our social anthropology, on the other hand, rejects metaphysics in favour of synthetical a posteriori judgements. This raises the question, 'why should we bother to read Kant and his successors'? Don't we belong to an empirical tradition which denies that the application of pure reason can add to our substantive knowledge of man?

Van de Pitte is a philosopher interested in aspects of Kant's thought which are not immediately relevant to even the most broad-minded social anthropologist. Nevertheless, his short work is peculiarly suggestive if it is read as an exegesis of the Kantian solution to the issue of how metaphysically derived insights bear on empirical anthropology. Kant belongs to both the traditions we have mentioned. Van de Pitte argues that even though Kant's Anthropologie takes an empirical guise, it could not be adequately formulated until the a priori structures of human experience had been presented in the Critiques.

Rationalistically derived presuppositions generate the reality of human nature to such a degree that strict empirical analysis must necessarily remain at a most uninformative 'cataloguing' level. Kant, it is true, supposed that moral philosophy 'cannot subsist without ... at least some study of man', but the 'practical anthropology' which can be said to ensue from such study took on a secondary role: Kant largely excluded the evidence of experience from his philosophical anthropology. He even reminds us of J.S. Mill when he claims that the findings of history must be evaluated against the findings of an a priori sector if man is to be established in his concrete entirety. For Kant, anthropology as philosophy took precedence over anthropology as the empirical branch of philosophy. The individual in his concrete entirety is subordinated, in the sense that the particulars of human existence are relatively meaningless even when they are interpreted in terms of the great fundamental principles of the human mind.

We do not suggest for one moment that this viewpoint should necessarily disturb our traditional empiricism. Kant established a set of distinctions which have since been extensively adjusted and re-evaluated; metaphysics is today a dirty word, so what brief has philosophical anthropology? Nevertheless, we are currently witnessing the inadequacies of a too strict empiricism. Look at it this way: in the run of the history of anthropology, twentieth-century British studies must be regarded as something of an aberration as a result of the certain interpretations of Durkheim which have directed our interest towards an autonomous and institutionalised 'social'. In other words, to the limited extent that we have spoken of the nature of man we have almost always seized upon what might be called the 'social expression'

solution. Recently, the procedure of treating social phenomena as a series of clues to human nature has become more to the fore. Now if some of us are claiming that the traditional scope of anthropology as the study of human nature should be restored, the inevitable corollary of this shift in emphasis must be a critical examination of the adequacies of the 'social expression' solution. What then are we to make of the philosophical anthropologists who already occupy this zone? We all realise that pure empiricism is an impossibility: whether or not our a priori assumptions are of the same ontological standing as Kant's, we cannot proceed without something of the sort. It follows that if we desire to take a broader view of human nature we must ascertain the extent to which a priori formulations intrude on the empirical enterprise. Can we indeed distinguish between a priori's, in the sense of initial assumptions or necessary conditions, and the more fully-fledged Kantian view of the synthetical a priori? For if we decide that our new interest in human nature is in some sense associated with our realisation of the inadequacies of empiricism and the 'social expression' procedure, then is not the way paved for a degree of metaphysics?

At the very least, Van de Pitte's presentation of Kant is a welcome thorn in our flesh. Assuming an interest in human nature, we can either accept Kant's position and put philosophy first on the grounds that there is some sort of connexion between the study of man and metaphysics, reject this on empiricist grounds, reformulate the whole issue, or maintain our present indifference by ignoring possible alternatives in the investigation of human nature. It is a moot point whether there is something to be gained by selecting Kant's theoretical basis as a programme for our reality, or whether social anthropologists should establish a different perspective on human nature, but whatever the case it will be for the empiricist to reject Kant's relatively negative assessment concerning the role of 'factual' anthropology. The great divide, between rationalism and empiricism (the a priori and the a posteriori) is still with us; van de Pitte's work should be read because it presents one corner-stone of a house which has not been properly designed. The walls do not meet, the foundations are ajar, because we do not as yet have an adequate plan to inter-relate the various disciplines which attend to the most important phenomenon of all, namely man himself.

Paul Heelas

Zande Themes. Essays to Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, edited by A. Singer & B.V. Street. £2.75 net. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

The essays in this collection are presented to Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard as a tribute to "the value his last generation of students, however diverse their interests, continue to place on his studies" (eds).

The eight essays usefully show some of the range of approaches that exist in anthropology today. The article by Krapf-Askari is a comparison of the sociological function of warfare in two central African societies and goes further than description by relating the differences in warfare to differences in marriage practices and principles in gift exchange. However, it is difficult not to criticize the simplistic definition of the two societies for comparison in terms of isomorphic elements: geographical location, linguistic similarity, culture (not defined), and their political systems (only "broadly speaking similar"). Bovin, in her article on Ethno-terms for Ethno-Groups, moves to an analysis which works rather through native categories and their meaning in order to establish an analytical tool which might be useful for inter-ethnic relationships, and tries to draw out its properties for the method to be universally applicable. It is a pity that she does not take the article one step further to show in what kind of situations and at what levels this type of analysis would be logically appropriate. Ethno-terms alone (or combined with kinship terms as she suggests) cannot solve the complex problem of the relationship between language and the many categories through which the world is experienced by different groups.

Singer's article "Ethnography and Ecosystem" applies an admirable approach yet omits some fundamental questions. He aims to relate the terms and models of the biological ecosystem to a group of homesteads in Zandeland. But this exercise rests on uninvestigated procedural assumptions. For example, he ignores the fact that in the biological ecosystem there are no intrinsic boundaries. It would have been interesting in such a study to have explained how the Zande distinguish themselves from their environment, perhaps in terms of classificatory beliefs. Street's approach is to establish a cross-cultural universal theme based on an analysis of the trickster stories collected by Evans-Pritchard with the Winnebago trickster cycle collected by Radin. This article picks up some of the lightheartedness of the joker but seriously introduces the idea that such stories are a reflection and a kind of explanation of the rules and boundaries of society. It is difficult, however, not to lose one's way in the meanderings of the trickster. Douglas, in Purity and Danger, to which Street finally makes due references, uses the trickster "differentiation" as an indication of the primitive mentality. It is difficult to see, therefore, why Street, who uses the same idea of differentiation and the order/chaos boundary to propose a universal theme, makes no reference to the relativistic primitive/civilised problem. What bedevils these articles is a lack of punch: an inability to impress their points on the reader.

The most interesting articles are placed at the end of the book. One hopes that the reader will be sufficiently stimulated by the introduction to pursue his reading to the last articles, and especially those by Singleton and Barden. Their approach is

to argue for and to work with a philosophical standpoint. The Zande ethnographic material is carefully used as a source for analysis and for illustration in philosophical discussion. Barden makes an interesting distinction between theory and action, between an analysis in terms of content and one in terms of performance, while Singleton draws a distinction between 'commonsense' and science, comparing it to that between faith and theology.

The value that all the contributors place on Evans-Pritchard's work is evident in the detail and general integrity of their studies. The editors have, however, set themselves a difficult task in drawing together essays around a central theme from people with such varied approaches. Their problem is reflected in the confusion between the theme stated in the title (Zande Themes) and that in the introduction, namely the furthering of contributions to the dialogue concerning the criteria necessary for an understanding of social life in order to try and provide a more rigorous philosophical basis for the social sciences. A lofty and laudable aim! If the essays had adhered to the latter - or both - themes, they would perhaps have had a more homogeneous appeal and satisfying entirety. As it is, the book is worth reading for the amount of Zande material it brings together, for the diligence which all the articles display and for the stimulation of a few. This very variety is, as the editors remind us, in itself a tribute to the wide range of topics in which the ideas of Evans-Pritchard have been influential.

Charlotte Hardman